



Potomac Hills

Presbyterian Church, PCA

By Grace Alone ~ Through Faith Alone ~ In Christ Alone

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Matthew 12:1-14

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English Standard Version

“The Sabbath of the Kingdom”

The 39th Sermon in a series on the Gospel of Matthew entitled
“The King and His Kingdom!”

Matthew 12:1-14

“At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. ² But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, “Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath.” ³ He said to them, “Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: ⁴ how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? ⁵ Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? ⁶ I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. ⁷ And if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. ⁸ For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.”

⁹ He went on from there and entered their synagogue. ¹⁰ And a man was there with a withered hand. And they asked Him, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” — so that they might accuse Him. ¹¹ He said to them, “Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? ¹² Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” ¹³ Then He said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, healthy like the other. ¹⁴ But the Pharisees went out and conspired against Him, how to destroy Him.”

Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us the Scriptures and making us Your people. You have brought us to this amazing Gospel to learn more about your Son, Jesus. We ask You this morning to give us the grace to understand what's really going on here. We don't understand how Jesus can break the rules and yet we spend so much of our lives trying to keep from breaking the rules. Make things clear to us. Enlighten our minds and refresh our spirits. By Your Spirit open this Gospel and help us to see Jesus, and, as always, for this we need Your grace. Give us the desire to learn from You this morning, in the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

INTRODUCTION: *The New Legalism*¹

Last week I read about a conference in which a well-known speaker related the cultural and value differences between his current home in the Pacific Northwest and his childhood home in a small town in the Southwest. These cultural and value differences found their expression in a set of rules. As a young man, his church culture enforced a prescribed set of rules: no dancing, no drinking, no card playing, no long hair. Those rules could not be violated. To do so would not only invite censure from the community, but he was also warned that it would put his eternal standing with Almighty God in jeopardy.

As it sometimes happens with this kind of upbringing, the conference speaker moved as far away from his hometown rigidity as he could. He escaped to the Pacific Northwest — a part of the United States known for its laidback attitude and freethinking ways. The speaker believed that he had finally found a community that would be free from the constricting rules and **legalisms** of his childhood. He was in for quite a surprise. While he had indeed moved far away from the many rules of his childhood, he discovered that the rules of his new neighborhood involved minute intricacies relating to garbage, the banning of plastic bags at the grocery store, and skateboarders or musicians in the common areas of his upscale townhome complex. The wrath of God may not have been invoked in the threats of punishment, but the speaker suffered the self-righteous censure of this community **just as bound by legalism** as the one in which he grew up. In **both** communities, he found that **the rules seemed more loved than the people they were meant to guide**.

In reading this story, I was embarrassed at the sting of self-recognition, finding myself within the details of his story. I might have easily looked down on one set of rules, while perhaps elevating the rules of the other. Yet, I cringed at my own self-righteous response. Regardless of the community rules involved, human beings seem to be **lovers of legalism**.

Why is it that human beings become **legalists** regardless of the rules involved? The desire to have clear boundaries, and a concern for decency and order to guide communities, is both necessary and prudent. **Somehow** rules meant to offer guidelines for living often grow into **gods** we come to worship — **gods** who serve as judge and jury for all who fall short of their dictates. Boundaries become walls dividing one person from another, and the enforcers quickly draw lines around the **righteous** and the **unrighteous**. **Legalism** prompts one to declare her “virtue” as the clearly superior standard.

Perhaps people find it easier to love **legalism** because it's easier than loving **people**. People are inconsistent; People are imperfect; People are easily controlled and confined by rules. Jesus frequently **shattered** these easy definitions put in place by the **legalists** in His day. He

¹ The Introduction is adapted from the article, “*The New Legalism*” by Margaret Manning, in *A Slice of Infinity*, the email newsletter of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries, 9/3/13, www.rzim.org.

upended expectations and eluded the tightly drawn categories of those who sought to control Him. He often kept company with those deemed **unrighteous** — prostitutes, tax collectors, and other sinners — and He earned the label of “*glutton and a drunkard*” by those whose laws drew clear boundaries around what constitutes appropriate company.

For those who had clear rules about the Messiah, Jesus steered clear of political power and stood silently before those who would order His crucifixion. And for those who wanted a “rebel” Jesus, freed from all laws and defying every convention, He answered by challenging His followers towards a righteousness that **exceeded** that of the Pharisees — the most religious-of-the-religious in His day. He told His followers that He didn’t come to abolish the law, but to **fulfill** it.

Far from being a measure for establishing self-righteousness or from creating a new **legalism** for His followers, Jesus fulfilled the law by revealing its true **intention**. He showed the true **intention** of the Sabbath law for rest on the seventh day not by enforcing rest rigidly but by healing those who were diseased, broken, and therefore kept separate from their communities. The rest God intended for humanity was expressed not in the rule of **non-work**, but in the spirit of doing and bringing **good** to all those in need of reconciliation. Fulfilling the law, He restored relationships and opened the door for transformation; He reconciled persons to one another and to God.

Indeed, when He was questioned about the greatest commandment Jesus replied, **Matthew 22:37-40**, “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*”³⁸ *This is the great and first commandment.*³⁹ *And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*⁴⁰ *On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.*” Jesus understood that the ground of the law was a love for God and a love for people. To replace the love of people with **a love of rules** misses the point. Loving the rules’ sake produces self-love; loving God produces love for others.

As the speaker suggested in his twin-stories of community **legalism**, people often miss the command to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves. As **legalists** of many stripes, we often prefer to apply our rules broadly and widely as a function of our own self-love. But in the idolatry of **legalism** and the attempt to prove self-righteousness, we ironically depict a truth spoken long ago in **2 Corinthians 3:4-6**, “*Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God.*”⁵ *Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God,*⁶ *who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.*” And that’s the issue in today’s text.

The Hebrew word **Shabbat**, from which we get **Sabbath**, means “rest,” which explains why Matthew introduced these Sabbath conflicts at this point. At the end of chapter 11, Jesus offers **rest** to all who will come to Him; there is no **rest** in mere religious observances. I called this the sermon “*The Sabbath of the Kingdom*,” but it’s not about the Sabbath itself, but the Sabbath gives the context for the real issue, which is **legalism**. So let’s turn to our text this morning, Matthew 12, starting at verse 1, and the first thing we see is ...

v. 1-2: THE LEGALISTS CONFRONT JESUS²

2 The Exposition of the text is adapted from the books, *The Reformed Expository Commentary: Matthew, Volume 1* by Dr. Dan Doriani, pages 490-500; *The Bible Exposition Commentary: Volume 1* by Dr. Warren Wiersbe, pages 41-42. And the Sermon, “*Will It Be Legalism or Gospel?*” by Dr. Michael

“At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat.”² But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, “Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath.”

Jesus is confronted for failing to keep the accepted rules of religious devotion. I’m using “the accepted rules” very deliberately, to distinguish them from God’s laws. Sometimes these two categories overlap; more often they don’t. As the events of **Matthew 12** unfold Jesus is being accused of breaking the Fourth Commandment. We’re dealing with a serious matter when He’s confronted for failing to keep the Sabbath. So what happened? Jesus’ disciples walked through a grain field and picked and ate some grain. Now there’s nothing wrong with what they did. In fact, it was expressly allowed in **Deuteronomy 23**. The problem was they did it on the Sabbath, which the Pharisees said was a violation of the Fourth Commandment against working on the Sabbath.

However, before we accuse Him of actually breaking God’s Law, it’s important to recognize that the religious bigwigs of Jesus’ day had made certain additions to the Sabbath Law. In fact, the religious leaders of the day had developed a series of 39 clarifications of what “**work**” was, so you could know what you could and couldn’t do. The Pharisees also developed Sabbath regulations that related specifically to the issues raised in today’s Scripture text. A Jew could not pick even a handful of grain to eat on the Sabbath because picking the grain was considered reaping, rubbing it between the hands was considered threshing, and chewing it was considered grinding. But it was all OK if he were **starving** — which, of course, is pretty difficult to prove. When is the last time your teen claimed he was starving, having not eaten anything for at least 20 minutes?

The critical issue is that the religious leaders failed to **distinguish what God said** from what **they said** about what God said. The two came to be viewed as identical. Now in the Hebrew Bible, you have the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, commonly known as “**The Law**.” But you also have the Mishnah, writings of the rabbi’s about the Law, and you have the Talmud, which is the authoritative interpretations of the Law — kind of like a Bible commentary with legal authority. And one section of the Talmud has 24 **chapters** of Sabbath law interpretations.

And it can be considered breaking the law if you violate the rules of the Bible, the Mishnah, or the Talmud. And since it’s nearly impossible to know all the rules, it’s nearly impossible to keep all the rules. And it hasn’t changed.

My daughter Sarah just moved from Chesterfield, Missouri (a suburb of St. Louis) to Baton Rouge, Louisiana. But back in Chesterfield, they have some unique rules to help the orthodox Jews who live there “keep the law.” Chesterfield agreed to designate a section of the city as a special area for a local synagogue. Since Orthodox Jews aren’t allowed to carry anything, including children, from one place to another on the Sabbath, mothers of young children can’t attend the synagogue. But by getting Chesterfield to designate **the telephone lines** from Olive Road to Woods Mill to Conway to White Road as an **eruv** — a ritual enclosure — they could call the encircled area a house or a domain, and everyone living within that area could then carry a child to the synagogue because they wouldn’t be leaving their house. The synagogue paid the city of Chesterfield \$1 a year for this designation. Orthodox synagogues practice this in many communities.

Now, as I said, three of these prohibitions were **reaping, threshing, and winnowing**. And the disciples broke all three. And so the Pharisees were outraged. They thought they had caught Jesus and His followers dead to rights in a flagrant disregard for the law. But instead of becoming **defensive** Jesus goes on the **offensive!** The confronted becomes the confronter, and so next, we see ...

v. 3–8: JESUS CONFRONTS THE LEGALISTS

“He said to them, “Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: ⁴ how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? ⁵ Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? ⁶ I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. ⁷ And if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. ⁸ For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.”

One of the things we will see in the Gospel of Matthew is that it’s usually **not wise** to go one-on-one with Jesus. Because Jesus, in response, appeals to the Old Testament, the book that the Pharisees are supposed to be experts in. And Jesus gives a threefold reply to their accusation. First, we see that ...

- **Jesus appeals to the King**

Jesus appeals to a king in verses 3–4, *“Have you not read what David did when he was hungry.”* Here Jesus appeals to an incident in the life of Israel’s greatest King, one of their greatest heroes, the founder of Jerusalem as the seat of government, the leader of the Golden Age of Israel. Jesus appeals to the Old Testament story in **1 Samuel 21** where David ate the consecrated bread in the Tabernacle called *“the bread of the presence”* or the showbread.

This bread was placed in God’s presence to symbolize that God was the **source** of Israel’s strength and nourishment and to remind Israel of their **dependence** on God for all things, physical and spiritual. The bread was considered holy and could only be eaten by the priests, yet David and his soldiers ate it. In this story, David is a desperate, famished refugee fleeing from King Saul. He and his men are starving and they beg the priest Ahimelech for bread. The only bread the priest had was the showbread and so he gave it to them and they ate it.

According to Jesus, David’s actions have direct application to the accusation of the Pharisees against His disciples. David violated a religious rule, even one found in the Bible, and yet it was okay with God because it was an **act of necessity!** Certainly if David can eat the showbread, then *the Son of David* had a right to eat His Father's grain from the field! And if King David broke the law and wasn’t condemned, surely Jesus could break man's traditions and be guiltless. Second, we see that ...

- **Jesus appeals to the Priests**

He appealed to the priests in verses 5–6, *“Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless?”* This time rather than referring to a particular story, Jesus describes the simple fact that everyone recognizes as normal throughout the Scriptures, namely, that the priests **worked** on the Sabbath; in fact, it was their hardest day of work.

I understand that. For 22 years Sunday has been my hardest day’s work. In fact, you’d be surprised how often I’m teased for **only** working one day a week, and sometimes for **only** working one hour on that one day. And while that’s far from true, it is true that it happens on the Lord’s Day, the day we’ve set aside for rest and worship. Yet no one — not even the strictest

“Sabbatarians” among us — accuses me or the other pastors of violating the Sabbath just because we work on Sunday. And frankly, the same goes for the many people who serve in Children’s Ministry on Sunday morning or the worship leaders or the sound crew or the set-up crew or the ushers or the greeters. They all work!

In fact, their service was in obedience to the Law given by God. This suggests that man's traditions about the Sabbath were wrong, for they contradicted God's own Law. But it’s not a violation, because the Sabbath principle was never meant to restrict **acts of service to God**.

By the way, let me encourage all those who serve God so faithfully on Sunday so that the rest of the congregation can worship and fellowship and learn. You’re a blessing to the rest of us! Thank you for working on Sunday!

Finally, we see that ...

- **Jesus appeals to the Prophets**

He appealed to the prophets with a quotation from **Hosea 6:6**, which Jesus had already quoted back in **Matthew 9**. Look at verse 7, “*And if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless.*” The Prophet’s point is that God is far more concerned about our hearts than He is about our outward demonstrations of religious devotion. When it comes right down to it, a heart of mercy always trumps an animal sacrifice, perfect attendance, special music, no matter how beautiful, or even a great sermon.

The Sabbath law was given to Israel as a mark of her relationship to God. It was **an act of mercy** for both man and beast, to give them needed rest each week. Any religious law that is contrary to mercy should be looked on with suspicion. God wants **mercy**, not religious sacrifice. He wants **love**, not legalism. The Pharisees who sacrificed to obey their Sabbath rules thought they were serving God. When they accused Christ, they thought they were defending God.

But I think it’s interesting that Jesus appealed to prophet, priest, and king — covering all of the Old Testament — a point that that Pharisees surely wouldn’t have missed. Of course, we know that He is the ultimate Prophet, Priest, and King. Note the three “**greater**” statements that He makes — as the Priest, He is “*greater than the temple*” which we read in verse 6; and later on in the chapter, in **Matthew 12:41–42**, we read that as Prophet, He is “greater than Jonah”; and as King, He is “greater than Solomon.”

And so Jesus lays out for us the divine principle that people shouldn’t suffer under cold legalism. God desires mercy, not sacrifice. In other words, Jesus is telling the Pharisees, “If you really understood Hosea and Micah – that God desires merciful, compassionate actions over ritual and rules – you wouldn’t have condemned My disciples for taking the grain. A thousand years ago Ahimelech the priest understood mercy and lived it out, not just with grain, but using consecrated bread to feed the hungry. Pharisees, you don’t know the Bible as well as you think you do, you need to show mercy.”

Then to top it all off, He says in verse 8, “***For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.***” That got their attention. The Sabbath is part of the moral law, the Ten Commandments, given by God Himself. Jesus is claiming to be greater than the law. And just so you don’t misunderstand this declaration, He backs it up by giving a vivid demonstration of what He means. And in so doing ...

v. 9–14: JESUS CONFRONTS LEGALISM

“He went on from there and entered their synagogue. ¹⁰ And a man was there with a withered hand. And they asked Him, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” — so that they might accuse Him. ¹¹ He said to them, “Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath,

will not take hold of it and lift it out? ¹² Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” ¹³ Then He said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, healthy like the other. ¹⁴ But the Pharisees went out and conspired against Him, how to destroy Him.”

So now Jesus heals a man on the Sabbath. The question the religious leaders ask Him in verse 10 is a rhetorical one. They’re not seeking information or clarification when they ask, **“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”** They **expect** a negative answer, because their interpretation of the Sabbath doesn’t allow anything else. You see, another one of the rules stated that if a person became ill on the Sabbath, treatment could only be given to keep him alive. Treatment to help him actually get **better** was declared to be work, and therefore forbidden. And that’s just helping him get better, so when you move to actual healing, you’re really in trouble! And now Jesus has done more than help the man with the withered hand stay alive; He’s dramatically improved the man’s condition ... He healed him!

Once again there is nothing in the Torah, the actual Bible, that demands one refrain from **healing** on the Sabbath. Jesus’ actions broke only their man-made additions to God’s rule. He defied their legalism. And there’s good reasons for that. First ...

- **Legalism demands extra-Biblical conformity**

Legalism demands conformity to an *extra-biblical* standard, usually by turning a principle into a law. This is a critical point. Law-keeping is not automatically **legalism**. Sometimes it’s just **obedience**. When God says, “Thou shalt not murder,” for example, we don’t call those who take that commandment seriously “legalists.” Or when God says, “Thou shalt not commit adultery,” we don’t dismiss faithful spouses as legalists. A legalist is one who elevates a **man-made rule** to the level of a **divine commandment**. Or he may take a good biblical practice or habit (like fasting) and turns it into a hard-and-fast rule, in the process distorting what the Bible actually says. Second ...

- **Legalism fails to read the Bible carefully**

Did you notice that twice in our passage Jesus says, **“Haven’t you read . . . ?”** That’s a crucial question ... **“Haven’t you read . . . ?”** You keepers of the rules, **haven’t you read** what God revealed to you? You leaders of *“the people of the Book,”* **haven’t you read** the Book? And friends, let me just stop and ask right here, “How many times would Jesus have to say that to us when we are arguing our viewpoints and excusing our behaviors? Have we actually **read** and **studied** and **believed** what He said in the Scriptures?

Friends, **legalism** always fails to read the Bible carefully. In fact, I think most **legalism** in the church, virtually every man-made rule that sidetracks people from devotion to Christ and focuses them on rules and regulations, would disappear overnight if the Bible were taken **seriously** and read **honestly**. Third ...

- **Legalism places possessions over people**

Here we find Jesus encountering a man with a shriveled hand as he enters the synagogue. And it seems clear that the Pharisees decide to use him for their own ends, verse 9, *“And they asked Him, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” — so that they might accuse Him.”* Oh, by the way, here’s a man with a crippled hand. So Jesus answers them, verse 11, *“Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out?”* Of course, anyone would. Anyone can see that rescuing a sheep in no way violates the spirit of the Sabbath law. But then Jesus asks, verse 12, *“Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”*

Jesus values people more than possessions, but legalism does the opposite. Let me try to bring this home to us here in the evangelical church today. You know, it's so easy to look down our noses at 1st Century Pharisees; yet it's so hard to see our own legalism. I told you at the beginning about a church community that restricted people from dancing, smoking, drinking, etc. And in a very real sense, that attitude made cigarettes more important than people, because they were willing to **write off** a human being because of cigarettes. Similar things are done in respect to dress and hairstyles and jewelry and body piercing and tattoos. Almost anything can become **more important** to us than people if we're not careful.

And then we see that ...

- **Legalism breaks fellowship over rules**

After Jesus healed the man with the shriveled hand, we read, verse 14, "*But the Pharisees went out and conspired against Him, how to destroy Him.*" **Legalism** has such a powerful stranglehold on some people. The Law is our automatic defense mechanism. We love the law. Why? Because the Law gives us a wonderful sense of **security**. It's black and white, and there's no wiggle-room, no room for compassion, which is so unpredictable and so uncontrollable. The law gives us a quick way to measure our spirituality against the spirituality of others. It allows us to judge them — by political party affiliation, by whether they have memorized enough Scripture or have regular quiet times, by whether they parent God's way or share our commitment to the right social causes or the right doctrinal issues. That's legalism at work.

In declaring Himself "**Lord of the Sabbath,**" Jesus was actually affirming equality with God; for God had established the Sabbath. He then proved this claim by healing the man with the paralyzed hand. It's sad that the religious leaders used this man and his handicap as a weapon against Jesus. But the Lord wasn't afraid of them. Not doing good on the Sabbath Day (or any other day) is the same as doing evil. Jesus argued that if a farmer could care for his animals on the Sabbath, shouldn't we care for man, made in the image of God?

They responded to this deliberate challenge by plotting **to kill Him**. Remember, they accused Him of blasphemy when He healed the paralytic in Matthew 9. But this was even worse. He had deliberately violated the law of God! He had **worked** on the Sabbath by **healing** a man. But the story doesn't stop there, because we haven't really looked at ...

CONCLUSION: *The Man Who Was Healed*³

The man in this text is without question suffering physically. The word '**withered**' is used to speak of a very unique condition in which the muscles, and often the bones themselves, are shrunken due to loss of nerves or stiffening of joints. When it results from anything but recent disease, it is incurable. The Greek word for '**withered**' implies that the man had not been born this way, but rather that some illness had taken the strength from him. Here is a man whose hand had lost the moisture of life. That which gave it strength had been dried out of it, and there it was a withered, wilted, useless thing, with which he could do nothing.

Can you imagine going through life without the use of your hand? With all that we do with our hands, can you imagine not being able to use just one of them?

Here was a man who, for whatever reason, had contracted a terrible disease that cost him the use of his hand. It would keep him from holding a job. It would keep him from having the

³ The first person account of this man was written as an assignment for an Inductive Bible Study class while in Seminary in the fall of 1987. The story is based on the parallel account in Luke 6. I last shared this story at Potomac Hills in April of 2001. Sometimes you have to wait a long time to find the right place to use a story.

respect of the people. It would keep him from going to the temple and drawing close to God. Perhaps it will help us understand what happened if we heard it from this man's perspective ...

"Yet again, I went to the synagogue on the Sabbath in hopes of seeing Jesus there. My shriveled hand has become an immense burden and I had heard of His healing power. Perhaps I will find Him and He will heal me too. The Pharisees were sitting right up front, as is their custom, and I had to maneuver around a bit so I could get a good vantage point where I can be seen as well as see. The Pharisees looked at me with contempt, they knew why I was here and why I had worked my way to the front. It was easy for them to be scornful of my wanting healing, even on the Sabbath, but then again, none of them have withered hands.

Then Jesus came in, I spotted Him before He was through the door ... maybe this time ... maybe this time. Oh, the Pharisees saw Him too, they watched Him as big cats watch their prey. No movement escapes their attention, their heads swivel in unison as Jesus walks to the front. He walked right over to me, as if this was set up in advance, as if He could read the Pharisees minds, as if He could read mine. "*Come and stand here where everyone can see,*" He said.

It was a calm voice, yet laced with authority. It immediately reminded me of the stories I had heard of Alexander, the great military commander of Greece. I stood up, without even thinking about what I was doing. Jesus slowly turned and faced the teachers. He was a strong man, the muscles of His arms toned and powerful looking, His hands strong. I had heard that He had been a carpenter. Tough work for tough men.

The Pharisees, despite being authorities themselves, don't respond to authority very well. They just stared at Him. Not one spoke ... not one. The silence was deafening. You could feel the tension as He stood there; His eyes were a cold gray, the color of a well-used sword. The inevitable question finally came, "***Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?***"

Jesus looked at them hard; pity or contempt, I couldn't tell. And then He spoke, His voice slowly turned from ice to fire; still soft, yet clear, "*Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So **it is lawful** to do good on the Sabbath.*" And then, without even looking back at me, the command rang out, "***Stretch out your hand.***"

I had forgotten I was standing in front of Him; I was so engrossed in the situation that I had forgotten why I was there. I stretched out my hand, almost afraid to look ... **and it was good**. It was healed. It was full and healthy and whole. I felt as if an old friend had returned home.

I looked into Jesus' eyes, and now they sparkled. My life had been changed ... and He knew it. He grinned at me, and with calloused hands, reached up and wiped away the tears forming at the corners of my eyes. The lump in my throat was so big I couldn't speak, so I just grinned back. I was so enthralled with this man Jesus ... that I didn't notice the Pharisees quietly seething and slipping away."

It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.

Think about that ... You need to pray.

Take a moment to do that, and then I'll close.

Our Lord and our God, thank You that You have given us a King. In this passage, we see Your Son. Open our eyes that we might see our sin and then see our Savior. We don't like people who have the same sins and faults and weaknesses that we do. And we don't like the

Pharisees. They're too much like us. They're legalists. Probably make good Presbyterians. And we hate that. Teach us what it means to do good on the Sabbath. Lead us to acts of mercy, service, and necessity. Show us how judging others is to harmful to our own souls. Help us to look in Jesus' face and see His smile. Thank You that He is the true Prophet, Priest, and King. And thank You that He calls us into His kingdom. And that He shall reign forever and ever. Amen.

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Romans 8:1-2

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.”